

Smith, Tasha

From: Emily Oberto <emily.oberto465@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, March 23, 2017 9:59 PM
To: JudTestimony
Subject: Written Testimony Supporting Proposed HB7285

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Emily Armstrong Oberto, and I am a proud resident of our state's Northwest Corner, the "Hidden Hills" of Litchfield County, specifically the town of Lakeville. I am here to testify in support of proposed HB7285, which intends to ensure compliance with the provisions of Section 7-294bb of the Connecticut general statutes concerning the acceptance, processing, and investigation of a complaint from a member of the public relating to alleged misconduct committed by law enforcement agency personnel.

Across this country there is a deep divide over whether our policing agencies are protecting all citizens fairly and equally, or taking advantage of their state-derived power and using it recklessly. While it is likely the minority of law enforcement agents who abuse or misuse their power, ensuring there is transparency in the reporting process will go a long way to (re)building trust between those sworn to protect us and the communities they serve. Citizens need to clearly understand how to make a complaint, have ready access to the proper forms in a language they understand, and receive timely answers to their questions regarding process.

Proposed HB7285 recognizes our police complaint process is broken, but we need to go further in order to fix it. I therefor support this bill, but ask the committee to amend it so that its intent is fully realized. A recent survey by the ACLU of Connecticut demonstrates that many CT police agencies still make it challenging for members of the public to obtain the information they need to expediently make a police complaint. In some cases, this lack of transparency violates state law.

It is clear we must amend HB7285 to:

1. establish meaningful penalties for law enforcement agencies that do not comply with state complaint acceptance and investigation laws.
2. create a standardized complaint form that is compliant with best practices and translated into all commonly used languages in CT, and
3. require law enforcement agencies to track and annually report complaint data to the CT Office of Policy and Management.

Establishing a transparent and accessible police complaint process is necessary for creating a fair and just police force in our state. Amending HB7285 will encourage the community's faith in the police complaint process and ensure we are holding our law enforcement agencies responsible.

I urge this committee to amend and support HB7285.

Sincerely,

Emily Armstrong Oberto